

REMARKS/ARGUMENTS

Favorable reconsideration of this application, in light of the present amendments and following discussion, is respectfully requested.

Claims 1-39 are pending. The specification and Claims 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 11, 18, 26, 28, and 31 are amended. Support for the amendments to these claims is self-evident. Claims 37-39 are newly added. Claim 37 finds support at least in original Claim 4. Claim 38 finds support at least in original Claim 11. Claim 39 finds support in original Claim 28, for example. No new matter is added.

In the outstanding Office Action, the specification was objected to as improperly amended in the previous response. Claims 3, 4, 6, and 31 were objected to for informalities. Claims 1-31 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 112, second paragraph, as indefinite.

Regarding the objection to Claim 3, Claim 3 is amended to incorporate the language suggested on page 2 of the outstanding Office Action. Accordingly, Applicants respectfully submit that the objection to Claim 3 is overcome.

Regarding the objection to Claim 6 for reciting “grows” rather than “increases,” Claim 6 is amended to replace “grows” with “increases.” Accordingly, Applicants respectfully submit that the objection to Claim 6 is overcome.

Regarding the objection to Claim 31 for reciting the word “second” before “tubular elements and initially provided ...,” Applicants respectfully submit that the second tubular element is recited in Claim 1, and Claim 31 recites two of the second two tubular elements extending from either side of a central portion. Accordingly, Applicants respectfully submit that the word “second” should remain in Claim 31.

Regarding the rejection of Claim 1 as indefinite, Claim 1 is amended to clarify that the inner annular groove faces two places. The first place is the first outer surface previously recited in Claim 1. The second place is the local annular added thickness in the region of the

fourth inner surface. Accordingly, Applicants respectfully submit that the rejection of Claim 1 as indefinite is overcome.

Regarding the rejection of Claim 4 as indefinite for reciting “preferably between approximately 10° and approximately 20°,” Claim 4 is amended to delete this language, and newly added dependent Claim 37 now recites this feature.

Regarding the rejection of Claim 7 for reciting “said maximum added thickness,” Claim 7 is amended to recite “a” maximum added thickness. Accordingly, Applicants respectfully submit that the rejection of Claim 7 as indefinite is overcome.

Regarding the rejection of Claim 11 for reciting a range within a range, the second range recited in Claim 11 is now recited in newly added dependent Claim 38, and Claim 11 is amended to delete reference to this range. Accordingly, Applicants respectfully submit that the rejection of Claim 11 as indefinite is overcome.

Regarding the rejection of Claim 18 as indefinite, Claim 18 is amended to replace “the elastic” with “an elastic” before the words “deformation region.” Accordingly, Applicants respectfully submit that the rejection of Claim 18 as indefinite is overcome.

Regarding the rejection of Claim 26 as indefinite, Claim 26 is amended to replace the words “the interior” with “sloping radially inward.” Accordingly, Applicants respectfully submit that the rejection of Claim 26 is overcome inasmuch as amended Claim 26 recites for example, the set-back (DC1) shown in Fig. 5.

Regarding the rejection of Claim 28 for reciting a numerical value within a broader range, Claim 28 is amended to delete reference to “10°.” This feature is now recited in dependent Claim 39. Accordingly, Applicants respectfully submit that the rejection of Claim 28 as indefinite is overcome.

Regarding the rejection of Claim 31 as indefinite for reciting “said first tubular elements” without antecedent basis, Claim 31 is amended to replace “said first tubular

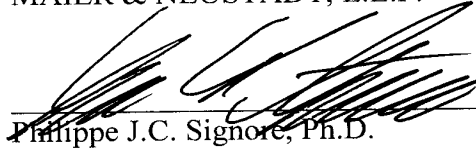
elements” with “said first tubular element.” Accordingly, Applicants respectfully submit that the rejection of Claim 31 as indefinite is overcome.

For the foregoing reasons, it is respectfully submitted that this application is now in condition for allowance. A Notice of Allowance for Claims 1-39 is earnestly solicited.

Should Primary Examiner Hewitt deem that any further action is necessary to place this application in even better form for allowance, Primary Examiner Hewitt is encouraged to contact Applicants’ undersigned representative at the below-listed telephone number.

Respectfully submitted,

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